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Summary record of the 20th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 1 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Sial (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Pakistan)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Agenda item 126: United Nations common system (*continued*)

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In the absence of Ms. Wensley (Australia), Mr. Sial (Pakistan), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 126: United Nations common system (*continued*) (A/53/688; A/54/30, A/54/434 and A/54/483; A/C.5/54/24)

1. **Mr. Lozinsky** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation had taken note of the positive evaluation by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) of the activities of the Working Group on the Framework for Human Resources Management. It viewed the Working Group as a field test of the procedural changes in the Commission's consultative process. It welcomed the fact that the participation of the staff representatives in the Commission's work had resumed at least partially. It was for the Commission's partners themselves to determine, within the framework of its statute, the forms and extent of their participation in the work of ICSC. The cooperation between the Commission and its partners was in the interests of all sides. At the same time, undue emphasis on tripartism must be avoided since the responsibility for the Commission's recommendations rested solely with its members.

2. Constructive dialogue was important not only in order to enhance the effectiveness of the functioning of the Commission, but also to gain a clear picture of conditions of service within the United Nations system. The Commission was recommending a 3.42 per cent increase in the base/floor salary scale and the introduction of a revised procedure for determining the scale. While his delegation did not object in principle to the implementation of the proposed adjustment on a "no-loss/no-gain" basis, it maintained that there was a need to review the link between base salaries and mobility and hardship payments and would insist that that issue remained on the Commission's agenda.

3. His delegation noted the Commission's conclusion that it would be unadvisable to pursue further the issue of the post adjustment at Geneva because of the attendant administrative and legal difficulties. It had considered with interest the results of the survey of best prevailing conditions of service for the General Service and other locally recruited categories of staff at Paris and supported the Commission's recommendation on that matter.

4. His delegation welcomed the intensification of the Commission's work to develop guiding principles for human resources management. Special attention must be paid to the review of contractual arrangements in the United Nations and to the wider use of fixed-term appointments and secondments from national civil services. The issue of fixed-term appointments was of particular relevance given the changing priorities of the organizations of the common system and the ongoing reform process. Such appointments met the need for flexibility. While there was undoubtedly a need, in the interest of developing institutional memory, for a small nucleus of professionals, his delegation considered that a rational combination of fixed-term and permanent contracts was the most acceptable formula for the recruitment and retention of staff.

5. His delegation supported the central role of the Commission in matters related to the determination and regulation of the conditions of service and human resources policy in the United Nations common system. It was not convinced of the need for the proposed review of ICSC. There was no indication in the documents before the Committee of the problems that the review was intended to address. The General Assembly had on numerous occasions reaffirmed the Commission's statute. Any review of ICSC must be conducted in accordance with its provisions. The statute itself remained valid and needed no revision. It was to be hoped that constructive cooperation among Member States at the current session would lead to the adoption of mutually acceptable and more rational decisions regarding the Commission.

6. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) said that her delegation was committed to a single, unified United Nations common system. It appreciated, in that regard, the valuable work of ICSC and wished to reaffirm the Commission's central role in the regulation and coordination of the conditions of service of the common system. There was a need for dialogue between the Commission and the executive heads and staff representatives of the organizations of the common system. Her delegation therefore welcomed the decision by the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA) to resume its participation in the work of ICSC and its active involvement in the work of the Working Group on the Framework for Human Resources Management.

7. With respect to the Commission's report for the year 1999 (A/54/30), she said that her delegation supported the proposed adjustment to the base/floor salary scale for the Professional and higher categories of staff effective 1 March 2000. It would like to know, however, whether the financial implications of that recommendation were reflected in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Regarding post adjustment at Geneva, her delegation supported the maintenance of the status quo. It agreed with the Commission that the idea of establishing a single post adjustment index should no longer be pursued, given the

attendant administrative and legal difficulties. It was satisfied to note that ICSC had included in its programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001 the issue of the framework for human resources management. There was an urgent need for the establishment of a comprehensive career development policy for staff members of all nationalities in both the Professional and General Service categories. There must also be equal opportunities for upward mobility.

8. Her delegation considered that the proposal by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) to amend the statute of the Commission to allow ICSC and participating organizations to request advisory opinions from an ad hoc advisory panel should not be pursued further. It agreed with the Commission's observation that the proposed mechanism would not necessarily be a deterrent to litigation since the advisory opinions would not be binding on the Administrative Tribunals, the organizations and the staff representatives. It had also taken note of the serious reservations expressed by the Presidents and members of the Administrative Tribunals regarding the proposal.

9. The purpose of the proposed review of ICSC should be to strengthen the Commission's role and maintain its independence. The Commission should have an opportunity to comment on the work of the review group.

10. Her delegation was concerned at the increasing risks faced by United Nations staff working in the field. The Philippines was proud to have been among the countries that had ratified the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, enabling it to enter into force, and urged those countries that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to that instrument.

11. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that his delegation was surprised and disappointed at the Commission's refusal to carry out the comprehensive review of the post adjustment system that had been requested by the General Assembly in resolution 53/209. The Commission's observation that the wide gap between the New York and Geneva post adjustments had practically been closed was irrelevant since the real problem was the difference between the methods used to calculate the post adjustment at those two duty stations. The current levels of post adjustment did not reflect the true cost of living at each duty station, and the Commission's inaction on the issue was resulting in higher costs for Member States. The problem must be resolved so that all staff were treated equally at all duty stations and salaries remained competitive.

12. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said that his delegation regarded the proposed review of ICSC as one of the most important elements of the Secretary-General's programme of reform. Any organization was dependent on the quality and competence of its staff. As the body with the primary responsibility for determining the conditions of service in the organizations of the common system, the Commission had an important role to play in that regard. The note by the Secretary-General on the review of ICSC (A/53/688), in which the proposal to create the review group had been made, had never been introduced in the General Assembly. As a result, the Committee was being asked to approve the proposed composition of the group, as described in document A/54/483, without having agreed on the establishment of the group or its terms of reference. His delegation doubted whether the Committee was in a position to do so. It did wish to know, however, what criteria had been applied in selecting the members. With respect to the modalities for conducting the review, it believed that the Commission and its Secretariat should be involved in the entire process.

13. **Ms. Trönningsdal** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the review of ICSC was an important part of the modernization of the Organization's staff-management practices. The review should take into account the needs of the United Nations, its organizations and staff, as well as those of Member States. Consultation should be as wide as necessary. The European Union wished to have an independent Commission able to respond effectively to changing demands in human resources management across the entire United Nations system. It supported the terms of reference of the review group and its proposed composition. It was essential that Member States should be fully committed to the review process.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.